

THE NETHERLANDS' STICHTING MILIEUKEUR

Introduction

The growing interest in environmental issues throughout the 1980s in the Netherlands encouraged the Ministry of Housing, Physical Planning and Environment, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs to create the “Stichting Milieukeur,” an independent foundation for voluntary environmental labeling, in 1992. Prior to the creation of the Dutch ecolabel, the government had established the Environmental Advertising Code to discourage the use of false environmental advertising claims. The Stichting Milieukeur (the Environmental Review Foundation) built upon the public policies that are the basis of the Environmental Advertising Code by creating a seal-of-approval program.

The Stichting Milieukeur is made up of representatives from government, consumers, manufacturers, and retail, trade, and environmental organizations. Although the EU, of which the Netherlands is a member, has an ecolabel program, the Dutch government proceeded with its own program to better accommodate goods and services unique to the Dutch market. It retains ties to the EU program, however, as a Competent Body. As of October 1997, the Stichting Milieukeur has set and published award criteria for 50 product groups, and has awarded the Milieukeur to 16 of these groups. The Milieukeur has also been awarded to foreign companies in the copy paper and chairs product categories.

Recent Developments

The Stichting Milieukeur has not changed much since its inception. The primary change has been an increase in reliance on market trends. More emphasis is being given to products categories that have a strong market presence where competition for an award can have the greatest environmental gain, for example, paper hand dryers, cotton hand dryers, and toner cartridges.

Program Summary

Although the program was founded and is supported by the Dutch government, the Stichting Milieukeur operates the environmental labeling program independently. The Milieukeur Board, assigned the essential role in selecting product categories and establishing award criteria, is composed of representatives from the government and manufacturers, consumers, retail trade, and environmental organizations that founded the Milieukeur. In addition to the Board, a certifying institution, recognized by the Board and requested by the manufacturer submitting the product for evaluation, is responsible for testing potential products based on a life-cycle assessment and assessing whether or not a product meets the defined standards.

The first phase in the award process is coordinated by the Stichting Milieukeur. Manufacturers, consumer groups, trade associations, or any other interested party can submit a request for the creation of a new product category to the Stichting Milieukeur. The board may then approve or

reject this application based on a screening study, which may be contracted to an outside company, that determines the expected environmental gain associated with the product category. Criteria are developed only for product groups in which there are clear differences in environmental quality among products in the same category. If the product category is judged to have the potential for environmental gain, a certifying institution uses a “cradle-to-grave” approach to establish the environmental burden of products in the product group. If this study suggests that the environmental gain will be significant, proposed award criteria for the product groups are discussed in a hearing with involved parties. The Stichting Milieukeur then decides whether to adopt the product category and its associated criteria. Product categories are reviewed every one to three years, and have been updated based on new technologies and changes in manufacturing processes.

Once the criteria for the product category are approved and published, individual manufacturers and importers may submit a product for individual certification to a certifying institution. If a product meets specifications, the certifying institution awards the applicant the use of the logo and signs a contract. All of these processes are confidential. An initial fee of 1,000 guilders (\$505 US) is collected, and then an annual fee of 1.5 percent of sales of the product is required for use of the certification. Products are audited every 12 months by the certifying institution to ensure compliance.

Program Methodology

As mentioned above, manufacturers, consumer groups, trade associations, or any other interested party can submit a request for the creation of a new product category to the Stichting Milieukeur. Product categories are evaluated on their potential environmental impacts. Once product categories are chosen, product criteria are developed using a life-cycle-analysis approach. The Stichting Milieukeur does follow SETAC guidelines in its life-cycle assessment.

When selecting product categories and developing criteria, the Stichting Milieukeur takes into account information from literature and studies relating to the product category, as well as other programs’ previous life-cycle-analysis findings. The Stichting Milieukeur also may conduct its own independent testing and studies, and will also obtain information pertaining to the product category from participating producers. In developing its award criteria, the entire “cradle-to-grave” of a product’s life cycle is taken into account and the product is assessed in terms of: the impacts of raw material extraction and processing, the manufacturing of the product, transportation and distribution of the product, the product uses as well as its potential for re-use, recyclability, wastes during disposal, the product ingredients, and, finally, the environmental performance during the production process.

Other Information

One of the more unique aspects of the Stichting Milieukeur is that it established award criteria for several food categories, including fruits, meats, dairy products, vegetables, and grains. To date, the Stichting Milieukeur is the only environmental labeling program that has established criteria for food as well as non-food categories. They made this decision based on the results of a study that indicated a need for labels on food products.

Although the government uses environmentally-labeled products for procurement on an informal basis, the Stichting Milieukeur is not involved in any formal arrangements with government or retailer procurement programs. Retailers do not preferentially select environmentally-labeled products, but do respond to consumer demand.

The Stichting Milieukeur is a Competent Body in the EU environmental labeling program. They are aware of and employ ISO standards, though these standards do not now play a strong role in the program's activities. They are not a member of GEN.

The Stichting Milieukeur reports that it actively works toward transparency and harmonization. It has a formal arrangement with Scandinavia's Nordic Swan and Germany's Blue Angel, two of the more developed programs. The three programs share ideas and jointly develop criteria for products (for example, toner cartridges and chain oils), allowing for more efficient criteria development and operation.

References

Brenninkmeijer, Helga. Stichting Milieukeur. Personal communication with Abt Associates. Summer 1997.

Luykx, Elvira. Stichting Milieukeur. Personal communication with Abt Associates. Summer 1997.

Stichting Milieukeur, *The Dutch Ecolabel: Added Value for Products and the Environment*.

Stichting Milieukeur, Background Documents, 1996.

Product Categories (number of awarded products in parentheses)

Final Product Categories

- Adhesive label
- Automatic car-wash
- Board and card games
- Bottom organic household waste bin
- Car care products

Cat litter (18)
Central heating systems
Chain forms
Chairs (1)
Cleaning and product recycling of industrial gloves
Clothes
Coffee filters
Coffee makers
Copying paper (6)
(Concrete) Pavement tiles
Envelopes
(Smooth) floor covering
Footwear
Furniture (with the exception of chairs and other seating)
“Green Funds”
Hand dryers (paper)
Hand dryers (cotton)
Handshowers
Offset cleaning agents
Offset paper
Paints
Personal computers
Ring binders/organizers (5)
(Other) seatings with exception of chairs
Refrigerators
Television sets
Toilet paper (2)
Toilet chemicals
Toner cartridges
Window products (curtains, etc.)
Writing materials (1)
Writing paper (17)
Apple/pear (1)
Barley/beer
Bread (3)
Flowers and pot-plants
Mushrooms
Onions
Pepper (1)
Porcmeat
Potatoes (30)
Sprouts, leek, broccoli, cauliflower, headed cabbage, carrot, strawberry
Sugarbeet

Tomato, cucumber, courgette, aubergine, melon
Wheat (1)

Categories Under Development

Duvets/pillows
Carpets
Chain oil
Other concrete paving products
Paint cleaners
Dairy products
Meat
Sugar

